

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 ORM-02

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 2894

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SREF, TH, LA

SUBJ: CONTINUED INFLUX OF LAO REFUGEES INTO NORTHEAST

FOLLOWING TELEGRAM SENT FM UDORN ACTION BANGKOK 04FEB77

RPT FOR UR INFO.

UDORN 0029

E.O. 11652: GDS

SUBJ: CONTINUED INFLUX OF LAO REFUGEES INTO NORTHEAST

1. CONREP VISITED BUNG KAN AND SRI CHIANG MAI
DISTS IN NONG KHAI PROVINCE FEB 2 TO INVESTIGATE
RECENT PRESS REPORTS OF UPSURGE IN INFLEX OF LAO REFUGEES.

2. BUNG KAN DIST POLICE CAPTAIN REPORTED THAT
DURING PERIOD 24-30 JAN 54 REFUGEES (NOT 130 AS REPORTED
IN BANGKOK POST FEB 1) CROSSED MEKHONG RIVER TO ENTER
BUNG KAN. POLICE CAPTAIN INDICATED THAT NUMBER OF NEW
ARRIVALS DURING PAST WEEKS, ALMOST ALL OF WHOM ARE FROM
VIENTIANE AND LUANG PRABANG, REPRESENTS A SHARP INCREASE
OVER WEEKLY AVERAGE OF 10-15 REFUGEES THAT HAVE BEEN
ENTERING DISTRICT. CONREP OBSERVED ONLY 10 PERSONS UNDER
DETENTION AT POLICE STATION DURING HIS VISIT.

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3. POLICE CAPTAIN SAID THAT THERE APPEARS TO BE A
THRIVING REFUGEE RACKET OPERATING OUT OF VIENTIANE WHICH,
FOR A MINIMUM OF 1,000 BAHT PER ADULT, OFFERS TRANSPORT
BY TRUCK TO PAKSANE AND THEN CONTACT WITH BOAT OPERATOR
FOR TRAVERSING MEKHONG. HE NOTED THAT MOST FREQUENTLY CITED
REASON BY REFUGEES FOR LEAVING LAOS TODAY ARE DISTASTE FOR

REGIMENTED LIFE IN LPDR, DISLIKE OF FORCED ATTENDANCE AT BORING POLITICAL SEMINARS, AND INADEQUATE COMPENSATION BY STATE (USUALTY CONSISTING OF SUBSISTENCE WAGES AND FOOD COMMODITIES), FOR CONFISCATION OF PRIVATE PROPERTIES.

4. POLICE CAPTAIN CLAIMED THAT ACCORDING TO HIS SOURCES, VIETNAMESE REGULAR TROOPS, "IN DIV STRENGTH", ARE NOW DEPLOYED ALONG MEKHONG RIVER BETWEEN PAKSANE AND PAK KRADING. HE SAID THAT IT APPEARS THE VIETNAMESE ARE PRIMARILY ENGAGED IN GATHERING MILITARY INTELLIGENCE ON THAI TROOPS. HE SAID SOUND OF GUNFIRE IN AND AROUND PAKSANE TOWN IS OCCASIONALLY HEARD AT NIGHT.

5. WITH REGARD TO NEWS REPORTS OF NEW SECURITY MEASURES BEING TAKEN IN DIST, POLICE CAPTAIN STATED HIS PERSONNEL SET UP SEVERAL SAND-BAGGED POSITIONS AROUND POLICE HQS EIGHT MONTHS AGO BUT HAVE DONE NOTHING SINCE.

6 IN SRI CHIANG MAI DIST, LOCATED DIRECTLY OPPOSITE VIENTIANE CITY, STAFF MEMBER OF DIST IMMIGRATION OFFICE INFORMED CONREP THAT 31 REFUGEES FROM LAO WERE PICKED UP DURING THE WEEK OF FEB 24-30. SOURCE SAID THAT DURING PAST SEVERAL MONTHS AN AVERAGE OF SEVERAL REFUGEES A DAY HAVE BEEN ENTERING DIST. DIST'S MONTHLY TOTALS OF NEW REFUGEES FOR DEC AND JAN ARE 150 AND 133, RESPECTIVELY. SOURCE CONFIRMED REPORT IN PRESS OF SHOOTING INCIDENT NEAR SRI CHAING MAI JAN 30 INVOLVING 5 REFUGEES FLEEING LAOS. HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO PS SOURCES, THERE WERE NO CASUALTIES FROM PL GUNFIRE. CONFIDENTIAL

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FOUR REGUGEEES SUCCESSFULLY CROSSED MEKOHONG TO THAILAND WHILE ONE DROWNED EN-ROUTE.

7. UNHCR NORTHEAST REPRESENTATIVE INFORMED US FEBRUARY 1 THAT DURING RECENT TRIP TO UBON PROVINCE VICE GOVERNOR SAID THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED 4,000 LAO REFUGEES RESIDING ILLEGALLY IN NORTHEAST BORDER AREAS OF PROVINCE, PRINCIPALLY KHONG CHIAM AND KHEMMARAT DISTRICTS. (IN CONVERSATION WITH CONOFF JANUARY 27 UBON GOVERNOR STATED THESE REGUGEEES NUMBERED 7,000). THERE ARE PRESENTLY NEARLY 4,700 LAO REFUGEES REGISTERED IN REFUGEE CAMP LOCATED IN UBON PROVINCIAL CAPITAL, AN INCREASE OF 1,700 SINCE LAST OCTOBER.

8. UNHCREP ADDED THAT A REFUGEE WHO RECENTLY TRAVELLED THROUGH BORDER DISTRICTS OF SOUTHERN NAKHON PHANOM (NKP) PROVINCE STATED THERE WERE SEVERAL THOUSANDS OF LAO REFUGEES RESIDING IN AREA BETWEEN NKP CITY AND MUKDAHARN.

9. COMMENT: WHILE RECENT REPORTS IN PRESS OF UPSURGE

IN LAO REFUGEE SYENTERING THAILAND ARE ALMOST INVARIABLY EXAGGERATED, AVAILABLE EVIDENCE POINTS TO A DEFINITE INCREASE IN NEW ARRIVALS IN BORDER PROVINCES OF NORTHEAST DURING PAST TWO MONTHS. THIS INCREASE IS NOT TOTALLY UNEXPECTED. PROGRESSIVELY HARSH LIFE UNDER COMMUNIST RULE COMBINED WITH COMPLETION OF APPARENT POOR HARVEST AND STEADY SEASONAL DECLINE IN LEVEL OF MEKHONG RIVER MAKE ASYLUM PN THAILAND APPEAR MORE ATTRACTIVE AND ACCESSIBLE TO MANY LAOTIONS, PARTICULARLY THOSE LIVING IN OR NEAR MEKHONG RIVER TOWNS. WE WONDER WHETHER, IN ADDITON TO THESE FACTORS, RECENT EXPANDED PRESENCE OF VIETNAMESE TROOPS COUPLED WITH RENEWED PL EFFORT TO PUT DOWN RIGHT WING RESISTANCE MIGHT ALSO BE CONTRIBUTING TO CURRENT INCREASE IN NUMBERS OF LAOTIONS FLEEING TO THAILAND. ANY OBSERVATIONS ADDRESSEES MAY HAVE ON THIS POINT ARE WELCOME.

10. RISE IN INFLUX OF REFUGEES IS LIKELY TO WITNESS AND
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INCREASE ALSO IN NUMBEROF SHOOTING INCIDENTS INVOLVING REFUGEES AND PL SOLDIERS. SUCH INCIDENTS WILL ONLY SERVE TO FURTHER COMPLICATE UNFREINDLY BORDER SITUATION BETWEEN LAOS AND THAILAND THAT SEEMS TO HAVE WORSENERD SINCE MILITARY TAKEOVER IN BANGKOK LAST OCTOBER. APPARENT RECENT EXPANDED DEPLOYMENT OF VIETNAMESE TROOPS NEAR MEKHONG RIVER BORDER, OPPOSITE NORTHEAST BORDER PROVINCES, IS AN ADDITIONAL POTENTIALLY DESTABILIZING FACTOR. FAILURE BY BANGKOK AND VIENTIANE TO TAKE FURTHER STEPS TOWARDS REPAIR OF THEIR DETERIORATING BORDER RELATIONSHIP COULD RESULT IN AN INCIDENT, IN COMING MONTHS, THAT BOTH COUNTRIES WOULD REGRET.

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